



VAGABOND

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Trainhopping 101: Gear for Trainhopping

(self.vagabond)

submitted 2 months ago * by [huckstah](#) [Trainhopper / Hitchhiker](#)

For someone hopping a train for the first time without any prior guidance, you will likely be HIGHLY unprepared for your journey.

Train-hopping, as anyone knows, is much more rugged and dangerous than most other forms of traveling in the vagabond lifestyle.

First, it requires that you are fit and able to carry heavy gear, sometimes at a long distance.

Second, it requires that you must carry this gear while also jumping on to a moving train, and this is a very dangerous act that has injured and killed many hobo's.

Last but not least, you are going to be doing TONS of walking as a trainhopper. Walking down train tracks to the the hop-out, walking down highways to hitchhike to the trainyard, walking miles



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An online community created by vagabonds, for vagabonds:

away from the yard to find a camp, walking to the store, etc etc etc.

Mentally, you must be preparing for the possibility that your train may stop where you initially planned, and it may stop several miles outside of the nearest next store or town. Suddenly, you are screwed.

Physically, it requires tons of walking down tracks, climbing up ladders, walking down long highways, running alongside trains, staying awake long hours, etc.

In both situations, mentally and physically, you will be screwed if you lack the appropriate gear:

1) Water:

ALWAYS carry enough water! This is critical, as you don't know whether the train may do something that you can't predict, and now you are stuck miles away from the nearest store or town.

Also, what you may think will be an easy over-night ride could easily turn into a two-day ride if your train happens to be "junk" or low priority. It can literally take hours to move just a few miles.

Most hobo's advice is to always carry 1 gallon per person before hopping a train long-distance.

Yes, 1 gallon is a heavy load to pack, but you'll be thanking yourself when the train suddenly stops temporarily for 14 hours, and the nearest town is 25 miles away.

2) Food:

Although you can survive longer without food than water, most of us are used to eating 2-3 times a day, and no one likes to go

Vagabonds, Hobos, Hitchhikers, Trainhoppers, Squatters, Rubbertramps, Backpackers, and more.

Feel free to share stories and pictures about your adventures on the road, or share advice and tips with greenhorns and lurkers!

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several hours without anything to eat.

Unfortunately, this will happen from time to time if you hop trains without being properly prepared with a few basic food items.

As mentioned earlier, trains can stop randomly for several hours, leaving you stranded miles and miles from the nearest form of civilization, with no food or water in sight.

Perhaps your train will start up again in 4 hours, and perhaps your train will be dead for 12 hours. Perhaps even worst, your train completely terminates and leaves you stranded in the middle of nowhere!

To avoid going on an accidental hunger-strike, always make sure you have 1-2 days worth of food when you hop a train!

Peanut butter, beef jerky, trail mix, canned meat, canned fish, canned beans, canned soups, whatever you prefer. Look for high protein, high vitamins, and high carbohydrates.

However, these things (especially canned goods) will add substantial weight to your backpack. On the other hand, it's much better than starving while you are stranded on a train or stuck somewhere miles outside of the nearest town.

3) Durable Gear:

If you're going to hop trains and hitchhike, you're going to need tougher gear than your typical backpacker or vagabond.

Those expensive bags from North Face and REI might be great for impressing friends while backpacking for a few weekends on vacation each year, but they are NOT going to hold up to an entire year of hopping trains, hitchhiking, camping, and

Meta

a community for 4 years



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backpacking.

Buckles will bust, straps will rip, clips will break, and eventually your bag will simply fall apart RIGHT when you need it MOST!

This is exactly why most trainhoppers carry military grade backpacks that specifically meant for long-term hiking, such as my [ILBE Gen II Marine Pack](#).

These military packs are sold by returning soldiers on Amazon for less than 200\$, but the retail value would easily be over 500\$ if these packs were sold on the open market.

These packs are worn by soldiers that endure extremely tough and variable situations overseas, including harsh weather and terrain, and this is exactly what makes it perfect for the long-term hitchhiker and hobo.

You can throw these packs off a moving train, or drag these packs up and down the highway. You can fill it with as much as weight as you can possibly carry, and probably still not fill it up, much less break its weight-load barrier. You cannot BREAK this pack.

If you want to do more than casual backpacking, and you truly want to hit the road, don't buy consumer-grade backpacks. They will NOT live up to a long-term style of hopping trains, and hitch-hiking, and camping out.

Buy military grade backpacks, or you'll quickly regret it and be looking for your "limited warranty" agreement for a new pack.

4) Footwear:

If you're going to be hopping, you are going to need quality

shoes. Not only for jumping on the train and keeping a grip, but also for walking miles and miles down railroad tracks or highways.

On many occasions, you'll have to jump off the train while it's still moving. Even worse, most of the places you have to jump off are miles away from town. This requires shoes with a lot of strength and grip while jumping off, and much needed comfort for walking long distances.

This is why most travelers wear high-heel Chuck Taylor All-Stars, or military grade boots, depending upon the type of traveler.

Wearing these shoes or boots is NOT just for a hipster/punk image when it comes to the hobo, as we use these for very real reasons, not for imagery.

Chuck Taylors and military boots are equally a trainhoppers best friend, depending what type of trainhopper you are.

Both are durable enough for walking down tough roads and rocky rails, yet flexible and comfortable enough for walking long, long, long distances.

If you have the economic freedom, you can buy much better shoes for this: Merrells, Redwings, North Face etc.

On the other-hand, this is r/vagabond, and most of us are low-income travelers that can't afford those brands, which is why most trainhoppers wear Chuck Taylors or military boots.

5) Clothing:

Trainhopping requires clothing that is uniquely different from any other form of traveler:

We ride trains that are extremely dirty, therefore we wear black.

We hop trains at night while hiding from security, therefore we wear black.

We are are outcasts from society that has created an anarchistic subculture, therefore we wear black.

In short, WE WEAR BLACK, and for many good reasons.

If your going to hop freight trains while wearing whites, khakis, colors (or basically any other color than black), your clothes will be so dirty that you'll have to be hitting up the coin-laundromat much, much more often.

On another note, not only is our clothing dark, but we also wear extremely tough clothing.

We wear Carhartt jeans, Dickies over-alls, leather jackets, Redwing boots, etc. We don't dress like bums or hippies, as we dress according to a rugged and working lifestyle. Riding trains and working on farms requires tough, quality clothing, and this is OUR lifestyle.

Whether it's jumping into a dirty train car, or getting a job on a tough farm, hobo's have to be prepared with quality clothing that can endure whatever life throws our way, including plenty of stains.

6) Protection:

Train-hoppers have been portrayed as a more violent or sketchy subculture as opposed to other travelers.

Considering the amount of ex-convicts, crustyfucks, and weird-ass oogles on the rails today, that stereotype is becoming more and more true.

You never know who you're going to meet in the jungle or the trainyard, and you better be prepared.

Although most hobo's are very peaceful, there are lots of fucked up oogles around the jungles and bridges that are looking for violence, and/or worse, stealing all of your gear.

On an entirely different level of difficulty, most train-yards and hop-outs are in very dangerous (ghetto) areas of urban cities, and these neighborhoods are simply dangerous for anyone to walk through, especially a hobo.

This has usually been the case for train hopping, which is why hobo's have always been prepared with various go-to weapons that are cheaply made for quick interactions.

Pennies (or any coins) in a sock hanging on your belt loop, monkey-fist cord on the other belt loop, railroad spike in a fist, knife in your pocket.

Although that seems a little extreme, that's the reality if you wish to hop trains for an extended amount of time in the USA.

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[-] **Romero75** 14 points 2 months ago

so how did hobos in the past manage without fancy backpacks ?

[permalink](#)



[-] **huckstah** **Trainhopper / Hitchhiker** **S** 25 points 2 months ago*

Suffering and desperate, mostly.

The hobo's of the 1930's weren't quite as knowledgeable or prepared as most hobos of today, as we have the fortune of learning from them and their mistakes.

We trainhoppers have years and years of secret hobo advice that's passed down to other hobo's for several generations, and thus the next generation of hobo's are more informed and better prepared than the last. This evolution still exists, and is present today.

Hobo's today have evolved with the rest of society. We're not the same thing you picture in a 1930's movie, or any of the typical media stereotypes.

For example, most of us are digitally inclined. Many hobo's carry smartphones, use wifi hotspots, public library computers, etc.

On another note, as technology has changed and become cheaper, we now acquire quality gear and backpacks, as opposed to carrying a suitcase or a bindle.

Also, we don't have to be limited to farm jobs. We use craigslist and find jobs doing all sort of things: construction, restaurants, forestry, processing, retail, etc etc.

Times have changed, and so has the hobo.

We still work seasonal jobs and ride the rails though, so the hobo culture has just evolved with the rest of time, just like any other subculture. We aren't cavemen :)

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[-] **Romero75** 5 points 2 months ago

Thank you for answering my question. I appreciate it.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[-] **huckstah** **Trainhopper / Hitchhiker** **S** 6 points 2 months ago

No problem. Thanks for checking out our hobo community. Maybe you'll see one of us on the road :)

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[-] **spud19** 4 points 2 months ago

would your standard army/military duffle bag work in a bind?

Obviously they aren't as fancy as what you linked but I'm assuming the canvas is pretty durable. And considerably

less expensive.

[permalink](#)



[–] **huckstah** Trainhopper / Hitchhiker S 3 points 2 months ago

Sure, A.L.I.C.E. packs are still worn by thousands of travelers, along with several other style military packs.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **Betazerg_** 1 point 17 days ago

A duffle bag is very different from an ALICE pack. I highly suggest not using one because of it's shape and the straps will dig into your shoulders. I have used one for years and always remember it being a big, cumbersome pain in the ass. I highly recommend an ALICE pack with "Hellcat" mod that gives better shoulder straps and kidney pad.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **newintownbtw** 3 points 2 months ago

Wouldn't it be better to carry dried foods like jerky, MREs, trail mix, etc. instead of canned goods?

[permalink](#)



[–] **kba3435** 2 points 1 month ago

Is carrying guns or knives common? Are most weapons hand made?

[permalink](#)



[–] **huckstah** Trainhopper / Hitchhiker S 2 points 1 month ago

Knives yeah, definitely...but mostly for camping uses or whatever, not for stabbing people.

Guns? Never seen a vagabond with a gun...

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **kba3435** 1 point 1 month ago

Is protecting yourself from others a top concern? Better way to ask would be are you worried about being attacked (or heckled) from others, both vagabond and non?

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **_forgotmynameagain_** Backpacker 2 points 2 months ago

Hi!

I have two questions:

You wrote: "In short, WE WEAR BLACK, and for many good reasons."

But I saw many photos (including photos you uploaded), where people were hopping trains and not wearing any black piece of clothing. ;) Okay, most people don't seem to wear bright orange or yellow or white stuff. Darker colors are preferred, of course. But I haven't seen so many trainhoppers dressed like metalheads or goths (colorwise).

Also, you wrote "which is why most trainhoppers wear Chuck Taylors or military boots."

I really like to wear Chuck Taylors (who I consider quite expensive btw.), but aren't they too thin and or easy to rip? Especially when they are worn in, super comfortable, but then perhaps a bit threadbare here and there? Two times up to now I had to walk home literally on my socks cause one of my (then quite beaten up) Chuck Taylors ripped badly and wouldn't stay on my foot anymore. So I would recommend always pack a pair of extra shoes (or emergency shoes like flip flops at least) for the trip if you wear Chucks or Vans or other shoes made of just a rubber sole and canvas.

[permalink](#)



[–] **feauxley** 2 points 1 month ago

"which is why most trainhoppers wear Chuck Taylors or military boots."

[Why not both?](#)

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **_forgotmynameagain_** Backpacker 0 points 1 month ago

If you have both with you I would think the boots would take much space in your backpack when you wear the Chucks? Okay, you could strap them on outside, but it adds to the weight you have to carry and they could get wet easily when it rains.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[–] **huckstah** Trainhopper / Hitchhiker S 3 points 2 months ago*

MOST hobo's wear MOSTLY black, not all hobo's wear all black.

Some wear khaki carharrrts, flannel shirts, red shirts, whatever.

But for the majority of us, 75% of our clothing, including shoes, are black, and we have many reasons for this:

hiding in the shadows train-yards, keeping off stains, maneuvering at night, political symbolism, etc.

As for shoes, I only spend my money on cheap shoes from thrift shops, which always have a pair of chuck taylors or military boots. Right now I wear black leather chucks, and I'm sure they will last me for many, many, months, if not a couple of years.

Strange that you mention carrying flip flops, and I'm somewhat famous in the hobo community for wearing flip flops. I got addicted to flip flops while farming in Hawaii, and I have caught many trains wearing flip flops.

But BEWARE, your feet will get really dirty living this lifestyle in flip flops. Here's a couple of pics I took of my feet after catching a freight train and hitchhiking while wearing flip flops:

Top of my foot: <http://imgur.com/LMEIC70>

Bottom of my foot: <http://imgur.com/u0sjuw0>

I always carry an extra cheap pair because they are lightweight and great for emergencies!

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[-] **_forgotmynameagain_** Backpacker 1 point 2 months ago

MOST hobo's wear MOSTLY black, not all hobo's wear all black.

Okay.

hiding in the shadows train-yards, keeping off stains, maneuvering at night, political symbolism, etc.

Makes sense, yes.

As for shoes, I only spend my money on cheap shoes

In the last years I never spend more than 10-20€ for a pair of (new) shoes. I don't need to wear brands. ;)

Right now I wear black leather chucks, and I'm sure they will last me for many, many, months, if not a couple of years.

Never had leather Chucks, but I guess they are more robust than the canvas type.

Strange that you mention carrying flip flops, and I'm somewhat famous in the hobo community for wearing flip flops.

LOL, as I studied I was famous for wearing flip flops year round, even in snowy conditions. I think one winter I only wore shoes for Christmas and New Years Eve (cause flip flops wouldn't fit to the rest of the outfit). :)

I always carry an extra cheap pair because they are lightweight and great for emergencies!

Yes, true. I once had a pair of the "flip-flop" brand (quite expensive, but not wearing out so fast). All the others were just 1€ ...

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[\[-\]](#) [huckstah](#) [Trainhopper / Hitchhiker](#) [S](#) 2 points 2 months ago

What country are you in, btw?

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[\[-\]](#) [_forgotmynameagain_](#) [Backpacker](#) 1 point 2 months ago

Germany.

Not travelling atm ... but in the process of a lifestyle change ... ;)

[permalink](#) [parent](#)



[\[-\]](#) [PasswordIsntHAMSTER](#) 1 point 1 month ago

You're recommending military-style boots - anything in particular?

[permalink](#)



[\[-\]](#) [Notenough1997](#) 1 point 1 month ago

Military surplus is always a good idea, and is relatively cheap. Most places of average town size will have at least one surplus shop, if not a pawn shop or other similar area. If you can afford high quality gear, I highly recommend 5.11 tactical gear.

[permalink](#) [parent](#)

[\[+\]](#) [\[deleted\]](#) 1 month ago (1 child)




[\[-\]](#) [pineapplesofdoom](#) 1 point 1 month ago

Needs an edit for the protection bit. If you are over prepared for violence and confronted by bull etc.

[permalink](#)



[\[-\]](#) [Longlostamerican](#) 1 point 23 days ago

 Would you recommend a camelbak for water. I came across one curious what youd think
permalink

 [-] **Betazerg_** 1 point 17 days ago

Camelbacks are a good idea, but the latest ones are too big and bulky with far too much "flash" or shit you don't need. The best way is to find a bladder with hose/mouthpiece that will fit in your bag. This also has the benefit of keeping the water cool by not being in direct sunlight. Somethign as simple as [this](#) will hang on your pack or just wear it by itself. Try to find an old used military surplus and make sure the bladder doesn't stink.

permalink parent

 [-] **drifting_in_time** 0 points 2 months ago

This post should be gilded. Wish I could..

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